



MALCOLM.



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MALCOLM :
A Story of
THE DAY-SPRING.

BY
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MALCOLM.

MALCOLM was fond of theories, and loved
To pack opinion into parcels trim,
And in the pleasant spring of life, which deems
Its buds full-blown, he made himself a creed.
"Old faiths are out of fashion : I believe
In love : a simple creed, but it will serve.
'Incomprehensible.' I've done with thee
And all the brood of formless phantasies.
Henceforth in travelled highways of the known
I walk unawed. Man needs not more than love,
Love that knits man unto his fellow-man."
Thus Malcolm dreamed and knew not all his need.

Now in those days, those foolish, generous days,
Malcolm had one near friend, light-hearted Eric,
Whose gift it was to spur the lazy hour
With song and jest and story, and to win
The smile from sadness like the sudden gleam
Which warms a wintry sky. His, too, the gift
To listen, and to lend an easy ear
To the large claims of Malcolm's eloquence,
Onslaught on custom, speculation vague,
Strange plans for fashioning the world anew.
For Eric liked the new philosophy,
Not loth himself, if it were possible,
To banish that stern power which with the gloom
Of its accusing presence dimmed the light
Of natural joy, and checked the natural bent
With "Thou shalt not," turn whereso'er one would.

They walked as friends together well content
One with the other, and the seasons passed.
But one day when the skies were clear there came

A trouble in the air, the name of Eric
Whispered about, with hints and rumours dark :
Then clearer warnings of a shameful deed.
The gossips buzzed, breathless and wide of eye,
And Malcolm laughed aloud, incredulous.
But Eric made no sign, and Malcolm knew
His soul grow sick within him when, forthwith,
The law stretched out a rough relentless hand
And held young Eric, on the grievous plea
That he had robbed his masters, the great firm
Known in a hundred markets.

Oh the shame,
The sorrow of it ! for the word was true.
Before the seat of judgment he was brought
A wan white ghost : there serpent-like his sin
Uncoiled itself to do his name to death.
The game of stocks, with its forced ebb and flow,
And lust of gain unsanctified by toil,
Had lured the lad. He had not meant to keep
The lost securities : they had been pledged

To bear his ventures through : a fond excuse
And pitiful, that could not stay his doom.
They led him forth a felon, and the world
Was different to Malcolm from that day.
Thenceforth he chose no heart to share his own
But walked alone, and all his thoughts were sad.

But when the years, the silent years had sped,
And Eric's name was but a memory,
And Malcolm's young disquietude had reached
A restless manhood, then there rose to him,
Once more, that dream of life complete in love.
It chanced to him—if chance in truth there be
In the strong hand which holds our destinies—
To look on Mary : all his being thrilled,
And one swift thought possessed him : " It were life
To love, to live for, such a one as this ! "

Mary was worth a true heart's loyalty ;
She was a gracious maiden, sweet and still,

Tender, yet self-controlled : a light divine
As of the sunlit hills from whence is help
Dwelt in her tranquil glance : and where she came
Came truth and duty and a happier world.
Malcolm spoke with her : for a time their lives
Mingled their currents ; and he gave her all
His heart, and lived in reverent thoughts of her.

But Mary took no thought of love, and when
Malcolm in ripening intercourse betrayed
His soul's unrest, denials, murmurings,
She bore with him ; for often in the blind
Bewildered fancies noble feeling glanced,
And Mary, musing with herself, would say,
" Surely the Master draws him, for he seems
Near to the Kingdom : " and she prayed for him.

So passed the days and love's unuttered pain
Ached in the heart of Malcolm ; yet he held
His secret long for shame of his unworth ;

And Mary did not know her power on him
And took no thought of love. But when at last
The tide of feeling brimmed and flowed beyond
The wonted bounds of will, then Malcolm spoke.
"I love you, Mary : all my hopes, my aims
Recur to you, as to the north recurs
The balanced needle : all I am is yours.
Wherefore, I pray you, let this gladness shine
Upon my life—tell me that I may hope
To gain you, and, some day, to call you wife !"

Surprise, with mingled pain and sweetness, shook
The heart of Mary : it was pain to learn
That unrequited passion : yet 'twas sweet,
'Twas very sweet, to know herself beloved.
A moment and she wavered, but full soon,
Sweetness and pain o'ermastered, she replied :
"The plighted troth of fairly-mated souls
Is sacred, sacramental, shewing forth
Christ and His Church. Yet marriage is a means

And not an end : a stair whereby the soul
May scale the steep height of the Heavenly Love.
I am a poor, weak girl ; often my faith
Faints and cries out for guidance in the path
To that high end : yet there my life must climb.
You are most generous, yet you blame the quest
Whose unseen goal the spirit only sees,
And bid me find in this low vale of death
The motive and reward and sum of all.
Oh ! friend, dear friend, on diverse roads our hopes
Are journeying : yet in the Eyes that see,
Doubtless, in some far-off completed world
Their meeting-place expects us : now apart
Our journeys lie : wedlock is not for us
Which only weds the hearts whose hopes are one."

Malcolm was silent, for her words revealed
The gulf between them ; and as the exile sees
The waters widen and the green shore sink
Far in the vessel's wake, and thinks that there

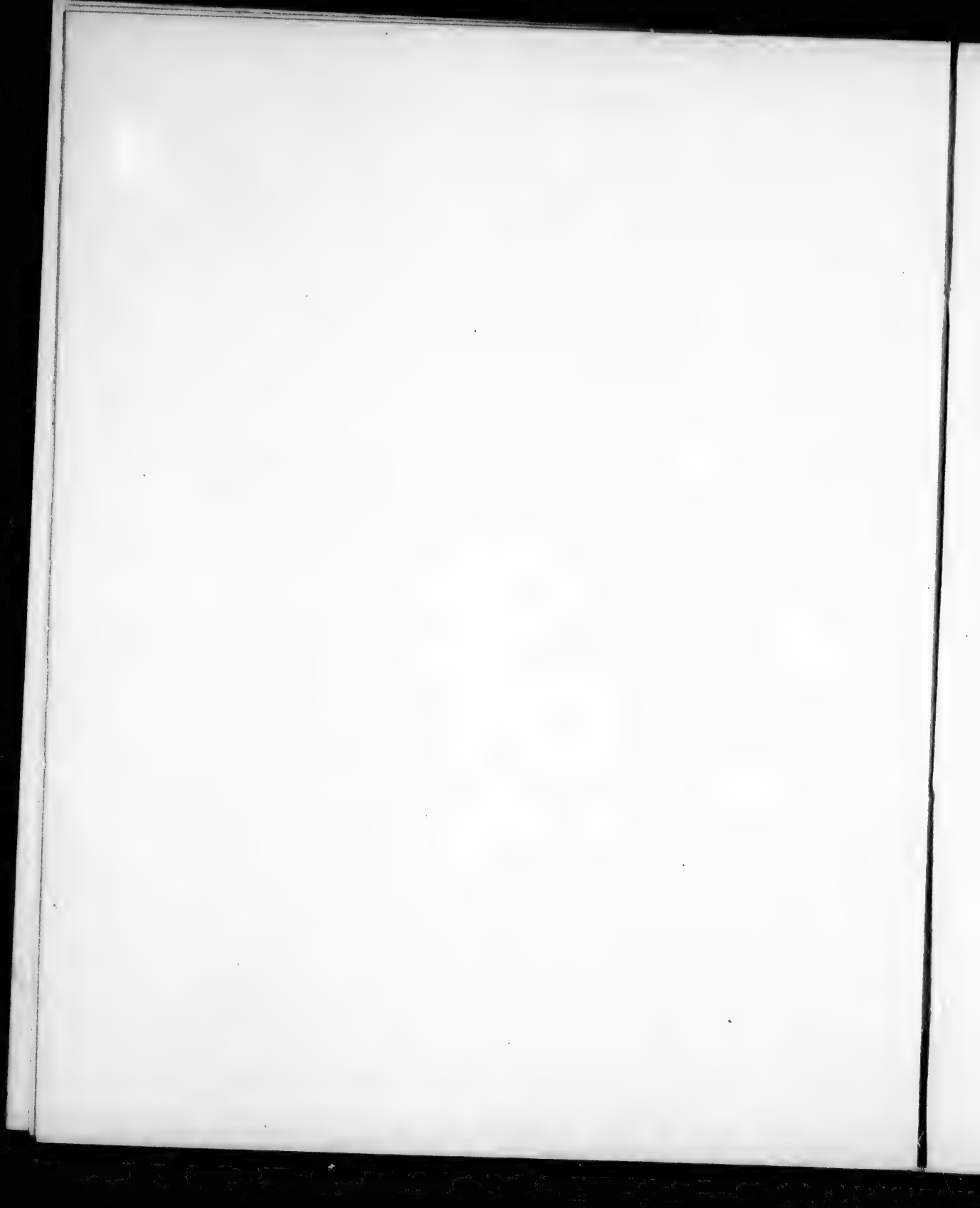
All that is dear in life, his father's house,
The fields his feet have loved, kindred and friends
Are sinking, rapt forever from his ken,
His share, the cold grey seas and memory—
So then it was with Malcolm : all the worth
Of life seemed fading and a dull cold void
Of loneliness to take him : for a space
A flood swept through him, grief and bitterness,
Drowning all thought and speech ; but presently
He gathered all his manhood and he spoke :
“ Mary, if there be such a love, a love
Better than all, divine, embracing all,
I pray that it may bless you.”

And he went
Out from her presence.

And the darkness fell
On Mary bowed upon her face, in tears.

A large rectangular frame is centered on the page. At each of the four corners of the frame, there is a small circular marker containing a stylized 'C' or similar symbol. To the left of the frame, there is a vertical line that is slightly curved at the top and bottom, resembling a handle or a pointer.

II.



MALCOLM went forth, and earth and air and sky
Seemed purposeless and vacant, and all men,
As tho' by some mechanic force impelled,
Hastened, a secret sorrow at each heart.

And now his daily necessary tasks
Which chained his limbs, but left the mind at large
A fretful vagrant, galling at the best,
Were hateful to him. One fierce wish was his,
To fly from scenes which everywhere invoked
His broken dreams: to traverse sea and land,
Haply to tire the wing of memory
And gain some shore secure and far beyond
The thought of Mary. Sometimes, too, the world,

The fairy world of travel, which had glowed
Oft in his eyes a rosy mystery,
Like a sea-cinctured island in the dawn,
Invited him, with promise of some charm
In magic cities, silent mountain-peaks,
Clear rivers winding under storied towers,
Potent to win the spirit from itself
And teach it to forget.

Three cruel months
Which were as years, wore themselves out at last,
And then the intolerable bonds were rent :
Malcolm was free, the world before his face.
Resistless, soundless, like the march of thought,
Which ever widens towards the vaster truth,
The river bore him seaward : and the sea
Was terrible around him ; and from out
The level wave stood up the elder sphere.

He stood upon the enchanted soil—for so
Across his fancy it had smiled—where art

And poetry and chivalry had grown ;
And soon 'twixt scented hedgerows strolled, and cots
Of rose-embowered happy villages ;
And now among the palaces of trade
In proud rich capitals, whose life sleeps not
But ever pours a care-worn hurrying throng.
Beneath the pinnacles of solemn fanes,
Religion's calm embodiment, his heart
Bent in strange awe, what time the voice of faith
Strove in the yearning organ-symphony.
The sunset splendours of eternal snows,
Lakes that, like gentle hermits, entertain
Heaven in their hearts, dark gorges, crags and vales
All passed before him. Now he mused upon
The mournful monuments of vanished power,
Grey columns, shattered arches, crumbling walls ;
And in the long art-vistas, where the ranks
Of lifeless forms and groups, wistful dumb souls,
Seen pleading for the dust that shaped them forth
Against oblivion.

He saw it all,
The great world-picture : and in all appeared
Some look or tone of Mary. No fair thing
Rapt him to larger being, but at once
The pang of self-remembrance pierced his soul,
And straight he knew himself, alone, bereft
Of joy, hope, faith, a whim of destiny
Tossed with a madly-spinning helmless world
Through endless nothingness.

A joyless year
Crept round with halting step, and Malcolm knew
That his small store, saved from a former time
And by despair the spendthrift harboured ill,
Had ebbd to its last coin. Then Malcolm drained
The cup of sorrow, in the stranger's land,
Too proud to stoop for pity, penniless.
But since, tho' loathing life, he still would live,
He set his hand to toil and in a town
Girt with a wide black plain, where engines groaned
And giant chimneys fouled the helpless sky

In sullen rivalry, he gained a mean
Hard service. By the greedy furnace fires
Which raged like blood-crammed beasts of prey, and
Red gleams of anger over roof and wall, [shot
'Mid base and gloomy men of alien speech,
Did Malcolm labour. Hard it was and mean,
And oft he wondered what undreamed-of power
Within, mayhap without him, day by day,
Bound him to that vile place and made him live.
Yet day by day he laboured, and it seemed
Not worse than roaming, and to gaze, and wear
The mask of interest, and dream that change
Of place is change of heart.

There is a star
Which watches o'er the night of souls perplexed
In waterless waste places, souls that know
Desert and darkness only, everywhere ;
No clue in the blank void, no voice that cries
In all their wilderness : fain would they give
Their hearts' last sigh unto the foul bird's beak

Whose slow wing circles o'er them. But, behold,
That thin cold ray aloft whose shining stands
Above a Christ commands them, " Rise again !
Follow ! my leading will not do thee wrong."

That pale star's name is Duty. Other light
Malcolm had none in this his darkling hour.
But this at least was truth, 'twas right to yield
An honest service for his daily wage.
To this he held, and all beside was night.
So meekly, in despair's dead calm, he worked,
Yet faithfully. And when some months were gone
A keen-eyed overseer spoke him fair
With promise of preferment, and betimes,
From his low place amongst the gloomy men,
To loftier duties Malcolm passed, and charge
Of letters sent across the fog-wreathed wave
To neighbouring English markets.

In the depths
Malcolm had been, and from the depths he rose

Subdued, nor yet unthankful for his gain.
And now, their strange tongue grown less strange to
With grave habitual courtesies he drew [him,
His fellows to him : sometimes, too, found ease
Of his own pain in pain of others shared.
For suffering had touched the frozen spring
Of sympathy within him, and the form
Of Mary stayed with him a higher self,
As long-lost forms stay with us of the good,
To bid him act that which his heart approved,
To make him sad yet pure.

Through din and smoke
The grey days travelled o'er that low flat land.
Malcolm in honourable toil aspired
To live his destined term ; and in the hours,
The heavy hours of leisure undesired,
Had solace in the simple fellowship
Of weakling folk. He listened to the tale
Of the worn mother crossed with household cares,
Endured the tedious tongue of age, or now

Sat by some wasted sufferer whose eyes
Were large with looking for the healer Death.
But more than food and raiment, men's respect,
Blessings of grateful lips and ministry
Of gentle deeds and words his soul desired.
Doubt, like a flame that strikes the waving wood
And leaves it desolate, a spectral troop
Of piteous gaunt forms, swept through his mind
Full often, and the withering sense that all
Was vain and meaningless.

There was a child
Who had grown dear to him, a tender thing
Springing in harsh untoward circumstance,
Like the rock-rooted harebell, to a mould
Divinely pure and fair. Comrades in many walks,
The boy had often cheered his elder's mood.
One day he sickened : Malcolm, sore dismayed,
Watched the slight spirit fail and strive and pass
Into the undiscovered world : then heard

The childless mother's cry, and rose and walked
Between the steep-roofed houses, sick at heart.

In the slow-gathering gloom he walked and paused
Where a small church, its portal free as God's
Great love is free, tendered its peace. Slowly
He entered, with a purpose half-defined.
He was alone : upon the rough bare bench
He cast his weary limbs and darkly mused.

What does it mean? Labour and loss and woe :
Labour and loss and woe : what does it mean?
And I, poor fool, I thought to frame a faith,
And with my little taper thread the gloom
Of this Cimmerian cavern life, 'That souls
Should live by love' ; fond fool that did not know !
What can love do? Love cannot cleanse the breast
Which holds our trust from vile hypocrisy :
Else had I not lost Eric. Nor can love
Compel another's love, else had I known,
Haply, the hunger of my heart allayed.

And now this nursling that an hour ago
Flew to my vacant heart with its young warmth
To leave it cold so soon : the desolate cry
Of that fond woman robbed of all her joy—
Ah me ! ah me ! Love cannot conquer Death.”
On his clasped hands he drooped disconsolate
And still repeated, “ Cannot conquer Death.”

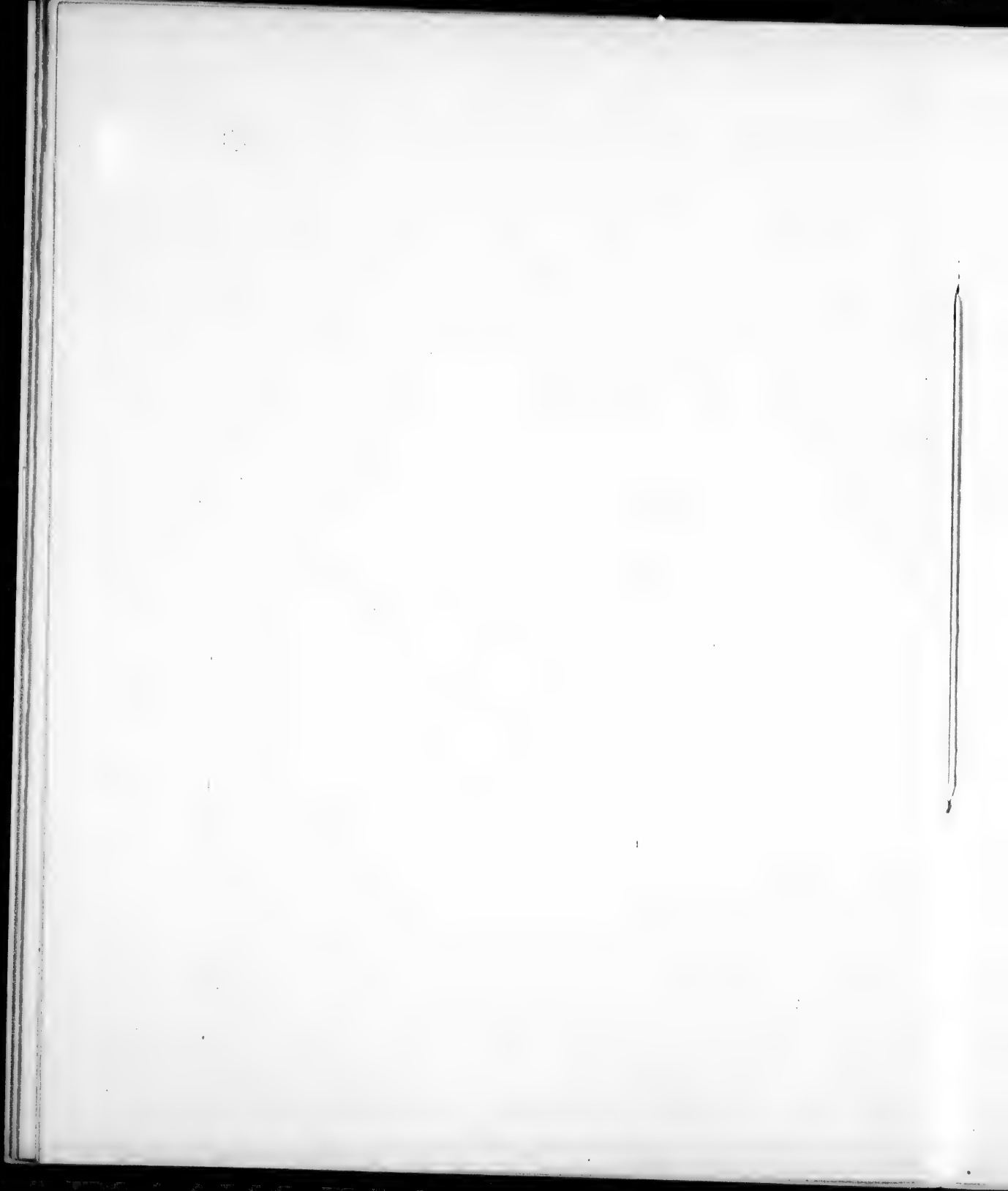
Above him hung, for comfort and reproof,
A rudely-carven effigy which told
The sorrow of all sorrows. Presently
He looked and mused and held it with his gaze,
And gazing listlessly was half aware
Of that he saw, till to his dreaming ear
These few words seemed to float from some far shore
Adown the silence, “ Love *has* conquered Death.”

Like a kind touch they came : the gate of tears
Swung softly open ; and—like the mariner,
Who hears the surf boom faintly through the fog

In anxious watches, while a weight bears down
His spirit, till upon the moment comes
A change : the veil is lifted : sea and sky
And the low line of shore stand forth unmarred
Where all was grey confusion—Malcolm seemed
To lose a burden : doubts and questionings
Melted like mists beneath the rays of noon :
The open secret of the world lay bare
Before him, and the Love which, all unfelt,
Had been the angel of his lonely way,
Now claimed him in the thorn-crowned Nazarene.

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III.



THERE is a harmony of nature's choir,
Voiceless, yet to the lowly spirit clear ;
The planets in their paths, the constant change
Of light and dark, of seasons, moons, and tides
Attuned to one large theme, "There is a plan,
And Love is in the plan." In Malcolm's ears
This strain exulted, and the dissonance
Of pain and loss mingled with its deep flow.
The light of purpose shone across the world,
Transfiguring all. It was another world :
That dim new world for which the spirit grieves,
And haply, after many wanderings, finds
In scenes and tasks despised. Labour was light :

The dingy town a goodly dwelling-place :
The smoke-grimed sons of toil his fellow-heirs
Of hopes as boundless as eternity :
And in a sacred joy the hours went round.
But when the rich dawn of the great awakening paled
Towards sober noon, a longing crept on him
To see his native country once again.
And still, half-hidden from himself at first,
Then taking strength and moulding all his will
To one set purpose, stole another wish,
To look on Mary's face. Their lives had touched
Strangely in the Love-ordered scheme of things :
And then had parted, wanting the one link
Which Love had strangely forged : what hindered
If Mary knew, if Mary did but know— [now—
That their two lives should merge, a single will,
A mutual light and strength in noble aims ?

So Malcolm toiled and prospered and laid by,
And when two years had nearly run their course

Passed from the dingy town and giant flues,
Passed from the low flat country, and again
Looked on the shoreless trouble of the sea,
And sailed between his native cliffs, and soon
Beheld the ancient haven and the roofs
Which cluster round its memory-haunted steep.

Waked from its death-cold trance by early airs
From sun-warmed everglades and golden groves,
Between its granite portals seaward swept
The river of the north. The citadel
Couched lion-like above the quaint grey town :
And, where a width of terrace meets the brink
Midway between the fortress and the flood,
Walked Malcolm, as the April night came down.
In the dusk stream a few long merchantmen,
The welcome heralds of the summer fleet,
Slept at their anchors : on the farther crags
Glanced the bright roofs and spires : and far away
On one dark peak lingered the day's farewell.

His heart was glad for all the loveliness,
And for the sorrows of the past, which seemed
God's ministers, severe yet kindly, charged
To lead him to his peace. And then he thought
Of Mary: would he see her soon? at all?
And straight a cloud fell on him, for each step
That brought him nearer to his long-nursed hope
Woke anxious questioning.

Enwrap in thought

He paced the ample level: and at length
Marked one whose downcast mien and motionless
Boded a mind that grieved. Him Malcolm passed,
Repasped, and looked, and stood all-dazed, aware
Of him who once had dwelt within his heart,
Its inmate loved and unsuspected, doomed
Dishonoured Eric.

Malcolm recoiled: the thought
Of fondness ill-bestowed and faith betrayed,
And the dark stain that was upon the man,
Steeled all his soul. But, as he turned, a sigh

Broke from the outcast's breast, most pitiful.
Then Malcolm turned again and mused awhile,
Noted the meagre frame and sorry garb,
And melted and came near and softly spoke.

"What, Malcolm—you!" and Eric drew away.
"Nay, Eric, shrink not: I am Malcolm—yes!
And still, because we have been friends, a friend:
And you—forgive me—but I think you need
A friend: you look so pale and sorrowful:
And you are lightly clad for this keen air.
Come, slip your arm in mine: my evening cheer
Waits for me in a quiet house hard by,
And we must sup together: come with me."
He led him tenderly, and the young days
When life was careless and this one its fount
Of bubbling merriment rose up through tears;
And Eric's heart revived, and when the blaze
And liberal bounty of an old-time inn,

And pity, not the least, had warmed his veins
His tongue was loosened and he told his tale.

“ Oh, Malcolm, if a sin can be atoned
By suffering, I have suffered : and I know
That suffering has atoned : yet not mine own.
I was thrust down amongst the dregs of men.
I hated them, I who abased my wit
To wake their dreadful mirth, more fallen than they.
My heart was hardened, and my life each day
Slipped down to lower levels. This I knew
And I abhorred myself. Belief in God
I had not, nor in man : in naught but hell,
For in my breast I bore the fires of hell.
I would have died but durst not, for, beyond,
I saw my torment, ever deepening, robbed
Of the faint hope of change which eased it now.
And change at last befell. Week upon week,
What time the bells rang o’er the Sabbath fields,
Armoured in purity, a fair sweet girl

Sought out our prison-house, solicitous
For the dark spirits that were dying there.
I heard her speak of Righteousness and Love :
Slowly my eyes were opened and I saw
The horror of my sin. And then I knew—
What I had known and yet not known—that One
Had died for sin. I saw Him lifted up
Upon the cursed hill, 'twixt two like me ;
And I who had reviled Him turned and read
The Godhood in His face, and was at peace."

So spake the convict brokenly, utterance
Failing at times beneath the weight of thought,
And Malcolm listened wondering and glad.
Then Eric, self-contained : "'Tis just a year
Since she was wed. I saw them both. He was
Worthy of her, a strong and helpful soul,
Commissioned with the evangel unto men.
Now, where another Britain springs beneath
This world of ours, they dwell ; and 'ere they went

They bade me come to them when I was free.
And I am free, my doom not fully spent,
Because I have been faithful in the tasks
Of my captivity. And I am here
To find a ship for England. I shall work
My passage there : thence to the far new home,
To live my life again and cleanse its blot.
In a dark hour you found me, hungry, cold,
A pauper, spurned by burly captains when
I asked employment ; but you came, and hope
Came with you, and my heart is strong once more.
And Malcolm I am glad to see your face
And say, 'Forgive me' : I was false to you :
My thoughts soared not with yours. You had large
That would reform the world ——" [plans
" Hold, Eric, hold !

My plans are humbler now ; and it is I
Who need forgiveness : for you looked to me
Who with false lights perplexed you ; but tell me now,
This fair white soul, this chosen of God who brought :

The true light, who was she ? ”

Then Eric named
The name of Mary. Malcolm heard and moved
Not limb nor feature, but in secret knew
That he was wounded sore, and held his peace.
Eric ran on, relating many things
Of Mary's praise—his own life—his resolve
To expiate the past.

Malcolm sat by
Grave, silent. When at last the copious flow,
Long-pent and affluent, of Eric's words
Dwindled and ceased, Malcolm adventured speech :
“ Eric, you surely are not built for this
Rude service of the sea : I marvel not
The burly captains looked askance at you.
But hearken now : I have been prosperous :
This purse—I do not need it—I had plans ;
But now—no matter ; I've no need of it.
The post of the old days is open to me :
I shall fare well : but you—take it, my lad :

Let the dead past be buried : sail away
Over dividing seas, under new stars,
And make the coasts of promise ; and tell her,
Malcolm, your brother—and her own (since all
Who love the Lord are kindred)—blesses her
Whom God hath used a light to wayward feet.”
And when with kindly importunity
Eric’s opposing will was overborne,
And all the slow months’ hoard (a tithe held back)
Was safe in Eric’s hands, Malcolm rose up
And walked beneath the stars that coldly gleamed,
Where a white road crept ghostlike through the land,
Beyond the shadowy walls, and all was still.

But in the breast of Malcolm there was strife,
And the chill night had flung her deepest gloom
Over the earth ’ere he could stoop and say,
“ Affianced of my soul ! Redeemer, versed
In sorrow’s uses, praised be Thy name !
Mine eyes were dark and Thou didst make them see.”

Yet for Thyself, my Master, for Thyself,
And not for her, tho' pure, the light was given.
And now I thank Thee, Who hast drawn my heart
Nearer by this denial. Thou art wise,
And Thou hast willed it. Praised be Thy name !"

When Malcolm rose he saw the world dark-rimm'd
Against still depths of blue ; the river shone
Between its dusky banks ; and, like a soul
Cleansed of all stain and trembling on the verge
Of sinless being, dawned the morning-star.

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